



Shire of Meekatharra
Disability Access & Inclusion Plan
2021-2025



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1.0 Requirements In Regards To Disability Access and Inclusion Plans

Under the Western Australian *Disability Services Act 1993*, local governments are required to develop and implement a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP), which identifies barriers to access and inclusion and proposes solutions to ensure that people with disability have equality of access to services and facilities.

In addition, a DAIP assists Council to mitigate risk and meet its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Disability Services Act 1993* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*.

This Act (as amended in 2004), requires local authorities to develop and implement a *Disability Access and Inclusion Plan* (DAIP), that will further both the principles and the objectives of the Act.

To comply with the Act a local government is required to:

- Review its plan at a maximum of every five years. The amended or new plan is to be lodged with the Disability Services Commission (DSC) by July 31st in any given year.
- develop a DAIP which:
 - furthers the principles and objectives of the Act; and
 - meets the standards in Schedule 2 of the Disability Services Regulations 2004;
- take all practicable measures to ensure the plan is implemented by the local government, its officers, employees and relevant agents and contractors;
- undertake public consultation, as specified in the regulations, when preparing, reviewing or amending its plan;
- lodge review reports, amended plans or new plans with the Disability Services Commission;
- report to the Commission by 31st July each year about:
 - progress made by the local government in achieving the desired outcomes in Schedule 3 of the regulations;
 - progress made by any agents and contractors of the local government in achieving the desired outcomes in Schedule 3 of the regulations; and
 - the strategies used by the local government to inform its agents and contractors about its plan; and
- report in its Annual Report about the implementation of its plan.

2.0 Background

2.1 Shire of Meekatharra

The Shire of Meekatharra has an area of 100,733 square kilometres and is situated 764 kilometres north east from Perth. The population according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 is 1,377. Situated on the Great Northern Highway in the Murchison-East Gascoyne region of the State, it is the centre of a mining and sheep and cattle district. Travellers passing through the area will be interested by the many old worked out gold mines and the relics of old machinery that go with them. The name, Meekatharra originated from an Aboriginal name for a water source which was located to the south west of the town.

Today's Meekatharra provides a geographically convenient centre for the numerous pastoral stations, established mines and mineral exploration groups to obtain their stores, fuel, parts, postal services and other necessities of life. The town also provides excellent health and educational facilities along with social and recreational opportunities for those many people living and working in the extensive surrounding countryside. It is a base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The climate is hot in summer and mild in the winter months. Temperatures extend into the 40's and the annual rainfall is approximately 200 millimetres. The landscape is mainly flat with occasional hills and in some areas stony ranges. The vegetation consists of mainly mulga trees with gum trees near the creeks and saltbush surrounding the usually dry lakes.

2.2 Functions, Facilities and Services (Both In-House and Contracted) Provided by the Shire of Meekatharra

The Shire of Meekatharra is responsible for a range of functions, facilities and services including:

- **Services to property:** construction and maintenance of Local Government-owned buildings; construction and maintenance of roads, footpaths; land drainage and development; waste collection and disposal; litter control and street cleaning; planting and caring for street trees; numbering of buildings and lots; street lighting; and bush fire control.
- **Services to the community:** provision and maintenance of playing areas, parks, gardens, reserves and facilities for sporting and community groups; management of public swimming pool; public airport; public library and information services; citizenship ceremonies; youth services and community events; and provision of a monthly community newsletter.
- **Regulatory services:** planning of road systems, and town planning schemes; building approvals for construction, additions or alterations to buildings; environmental health services and ranger services, including dog control.
- **General administration:** the provision of general information to the public and the lodging of complaints and payment of fees including rates and dog/cat licences.
- **Processes of government:** ordinary and special Local Government and committee meetings; Council meetings, election of Council Members and community consultations.

2.3 People with Disability in the Shire of Meekatharra

Although the population within the Shire of Meekatharra has had periods of growth and periods of decline, the ABS data for 2016 shows a population of 708. Fluctuations in population can be contributed the level of mining or pastoral activity occurring within the Shire Boundaries. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and carers (2009), 18.5% of Australians identify themselves as having some form of disability. Based on the population estimate and these findings, it is estimated that there may be around 133 people with disability living within the Shire's Boundaries.

Although the Shire's population is considered quite small, a large number of tourists travelling on the Great Northern Highway have access to the town's facilities and services. It is therefore crucial that visitors are also considered when making provisions for people with disability.

3.0 Access And Inclusion Policy Statement

The Shire of Meekatharra is committed to ensuring that the community is an accessible and inclusive community for people with disability, their families and carers. The Shire of Meekatharra interprets an accessible and inclusive community as one in which all council functions, facilities and services (both in-house and contracted) are open, available and accessible to people with disability, providing them with the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities enjoyed by other people in the community. The Shire of Meekatharra recognises that people with disability are valued members of the community who make a variety of contributions to local social, economic and cultural life. The Shire believes that a community that recognises its diversity and supports the participation and inclusion of all its members makes for a richer community life.

The Shire of Meekatharra believes that people with disability, their families and carers who live in country areas should be supported, as far as practicable, to remain in the community of their choice. The Shire of Meekatharra is committed to consulting with people with disability, their families and carers and where required, disability organisations to ensure that barriers to access and inclusion are addressed appropriately.

The Shire of Meekatharra is committed to ensuring that its agents and contractors work towards the desired outcomes of the DAIP. The Shire of Meekatharra is committed to working in partnership with local community groups and businesses to facilitate the inclusion of people with disability through improved access to facilities and services in the community.

The Shire of Meekatharra is committed to achieving the seven desired outcomes of its DAIP:

1. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, a public authority.
2. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of a public authority.
3. People with disability receive information from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.
4. People with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of a public authority as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.
5. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to a public authority.
6. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by a public authority.
7. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority.

4.0 Review of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

4.1 Responsibility for the Planning Process

The Community Development and Services Manager has responsibility to oversee the development, implementation, review and evaluation of the plan. The final plan is endorsed by Council and it is the responsibility of all officers to implement the relevant actions.

4.2 Community Consultation Process

In 2021, the Shire undertook to review its Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) consult with key stakeholders and draft a new DAIP to guide further improvements to access and inclusion.

The process included:

- examination of the initial DSP and subsequent progress reports to see what has been achieved and what still needs work;
- consultation with key staff; and
- consultation with the community.

The Disability Services Act Regulations (2004) set out the minimum consultation requirements for public authorities in relation to Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). Local Governments must call for submissions

(either general or specific) by notice in a newspaper circulating in the Local Government area and on any website maintained by or on behalf of the Local Government. Other mechanisms may also be used.

The Shire of Meekatharra was able to update their Disability Service Plan to meet the requirements of creating a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, due to a process of community consultation which included:

- A questionnaire regarding the current Disability Access and Inclusion Plan was featured on the Shire's website and displayed in the Shire Office and in the Shire's Local Community Newsletter for a period of 30 days.
- This questionnaire was made available at the Library, Meekatharra Community Resource Centre, Community Health and Meekatharra Hospital reception area, to ask residents to identify any problems they had using services, accessing information, contributing to decision-making processes, making complaints, physically accessing Council facilities, and generally getting around and being included in the community. Unfortunately, no completed questionnaires were returned to the Shire.

- A four-week public consultation period was advertised for local businesses, government departments/agencies and the wider community to provide feedback and suggestions in relation to the draft DAIP. Copies of the plan were provided throughout the community and readily accessible in various public places.

4.3 Community Consultation Outcomes

The initial review and consultation undertaken in 2021 found that there was a low level of awareness about the Shire's then current Disability Service Plan. As part of the need to continually review the plan opinions provided to the Shire of Meekatharra are considered when reviewing this plan. The updated plan continues to reflect legislative and regulatory changes such as striving for inclusion and access beyond the minimum compliance of the standards.

The initial consultation undertaken in 2021 identified a variety of remaining barriers to access and inclusion, which continue to be addressed in the reviewed DAIP Action Plan.

4.4 Access Barriers

The access barriers identified in the initial consultation process undertaken in 2021 were:

- Shire policy to guide and inform access and inclusion activities may not reflect contemporary values and practice.
- Processes of the Shire may not be as accessible as possible.
- Events may not always be held in a manner and location that best facilitates the participation of people with disability.
- Elements of the Shire's website require improvement to best meet the needs of people with disability.
- Staff may be uninformed or lacking in confidence to adequately provide the same level of service to people with disability.
- People with disability may not be aware of consultation opportunities with the Shire.

These barriers informed the development of strategies in the Shire of Meekatharra's initial DAIP. The barriers have been prioritised in order of importance, which assists in setting timeframes for the completion of strategies to overcome those access barriers.

4.5 Responsibility for Implementing the DAIP

Implementation of the DAIP is the responsibility of all areas of the Shire. Some actions in the Implementation Plan will apply to all areas of the Shire while others will apply to a specific area. The Implementation Plan sets out who is responsible for each action.

4.6 Communicating the Plan to Staff and People with Disability

The following methods of communication will be used to advise staff and people with disability of the reviewed DAIP:

- A copy of the Meekatharra Disability Access and Inclusion Plan will be available on request at the Shire Office in various forms including hard copy (regular and large print), audio format on CD, by email, and on the Shire's website.
- Promotion of the adopted DAIP will be advertised in the Shires monthly newsletter, on the community notice board, and at other various locations around the town.
- A copy of the DAIP will be given to all contractors employed by the Shire of Meekatharra and all staff made aware of its existence and availability.
- As plans are amended, notification will be given using the same methods used previously.

4.7 Review and Evaluation Mechanisms

The Disability Services Act sets out the minimum review requirements for public authorities in relation to DAIPs. The Shire's DAIP will be reviewed at least every five years, in accordance with the Act. Whenever the DAIP is amended, a copy of the amended plan will be lodged with the Disability Services Commission.

4.8 Reporting on the DAIP

The Disability Services Act sets out the minimum reporting requirements for public authorities in relation to DAIPs.

The Shire of Meekatharra will report on the implementation of its DAIP through its Annual Report and the prescribed progress report template to the Disability Services Commission by 4 July each year, outlining:

- Progress towards the desired outcomes of its DAIP
- Progress of its agents and contractors of its DAIP
- The strategies used to inform its agents and contractors of its DAIP

5.0 Strategies to Improve Access and Inclusion

The following overarching strategies have been developed to address each of the seven desired outcome areas of the Disability Services Act from feedback gained in the consultation process. These will form the basis of the Implementation Plan.

5.1 Outcome 1

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, the Shire of Meekatharra.

Strategy	Timeline
Events and meetings held by the Shire are to be accessible and inclusive for people with a disability and people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	Ongoing
Contractors providing public services on behalf of the Shire of Meekatharra are aware of their responsibility to ensure their services are accessible and inclusive	Ongoing
Ensure that the community has an opportunity to provide feedback on current levels of access	By July 31 st annually
Ensure that Shire staff and contractors are aware of the relevant requirements of the Disability Services Act	Upon commencement
Include a Disability Access and Inclusion Policy when the Shire's Policy Manual is updated, to ensure it supports equitable access to services by people with disability throughout the various functions of the Shire	Ongoing

5.2 Outcome 2

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of the Shire of Meekatharra.

Strategy	Timeline
Ensure that all new or redevelopment works provide access to people with disability, where practicable	Ongoing

Ensure that all premises and other infrastructure related to transport facilities are accessible	Ongoing
Ensure that parks and reserves are accessible	Ongoing
Ensure that public toilets meet the associated accessibility standards	Ongoing
Ensure that all buildings and facilities are physically accessible to people with disability	Ongoing
Ensure that footpaths, pavements and walk trails are free from debris such as gum nuts, rubbish, gravel and sand which may cause injuries or falls.	Ongoing

5.3 Outcome 3

People with disability receive information from the Shire of Meekatharra in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.

Strategy	Timeline
Ensure that Shire information is available in various formats upon request and that all new documentation and publications are designed with access requirements in mind	Ongoing
Improve community awareness that Shire information is available in alternative formats upon request	Ongoing
Provide documentation regarding services, facilities and customer feedback in an appropriate format using clear and concise language	Ongoing

5.4 Outcome 4

People with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of the Shire of Meekatharra as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.

Strategy	Timeline
Improve staff awareness of disability and access issues and improve skills to provide a good service to people with disability	Ongoing
Improve the awareness of new employees and new Councillors about disability and access issues	Ongoing

5.5 Outcome 5

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to the Shire of Meekatharra

Strategy	Timeline
Ensure people with disability are made aware of advocacy opportunities both within the Shire and externally	Ongoing
Improve staff knowledge so they can facilitate the receipt of complaints from people with a disability	Ongoing

5.6 Outcome 6

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by the Shire of Meekatharra

Strategy	Timeline
Commit to ongoing monitoring of the DAIP to ensure implementation and satisfactory outcomes	By July 31 st each year
Widely promote opportunities for consultation	Ongoing

5.7 Outcome 7

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with the Shire of Meekatharra

Strategy	Timeline
Commit to using inclusive recruitment practices when advertising new positions.	Ongoing
Engage with key disability employment support providers	Ongoing
Ensure policies and procedures are regularly reviewed	Ongoing